

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Southern Montana Telephone Wisdom Exchange
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2018
Proponent:	Southern Montana Telephone
Location:	Sections 22 & 23, Township 4 South – Range 16 West (Capital Buildings Trust)
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proposed action is the issuance of a Utility Easement for the installation of a new underground telecommunications cable to upgrade their current facilities to the Wisdom Montana Exchange service area. The proposed route is the most direct route between terminus locations while also providing access to existing and future network considerations. The proposed route will provide accessibility for construction and maintenance since it is located primarily along an existing roadway on the state parcel. The total length of the proposal is approximately 5,561 feet in length and 20 feet wide. The right of way would encumber 2.486 acres of state land.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

The following parties were contacted for this proposal;

DNRC, Archaeologist, P. Rennie
FWP, Wildlife Biologist, Vanna Boccadori
Montana Natural Heritage Program
Russell Peterson
Beaverhead County Commissioners

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

No other government agencies have jurisdiction. No other permits are needed.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No Action Alternative: A Utility Easement would not be issued to Southern Montana Telephone for the installation of an underground telecommunications cable across state land.

Action Alternative: A Utility Easement would be issued to Southern Montana Telephone for the installation of an underground telecommunications cable across state land.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The installation route follows an existing road on State Land. The soils at the site of the proposal are a mixture of granitic loams. Impacts to the existing road and soils in the project area are not expected. The cable would be installed using a direct plow method, which opens the ground with the plow pulled behind a dozer, installs the cable, then buries and flattens the disturbed soil. This results in a two foot or less temporary disturbance area.

Action Alternative: Under this alternative a small amount of soil disturbance would occur, however impacts would be small and of a short duration. No long term or cumulative impacts are anticipated to geology, and soil stability under the action alternative.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to soils would occur.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

There aren't any perennial or intermittent streams or springs within the project area. No long term or cumulative effects are anticipated from either of the proposed alternatives to water quality, quantity and water distribution.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Action Alternative: The action alternative would produce and release into the air a small amount of dust and dirt particulate materials and could have a short-term impact on air quality in the area. The project however is located in a remote area away from a population center and no long term or cumulative effects to air quality would be anticipated. The area is not considered a class 1 air shed.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to air quality are anticipated under this alternative.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

No rare plants or cover types have been noted in the project area or on the State tract. The area along the proposed route is mainly bunch grasses and sage brush.

No noxious weeds have been noted along the proposed project route or on the State tract.

Action Alternative: The action alternative has the possibility of introducing noxious weeds to the state lands when the ground is disturbed during the installation of the telecommunications line. The DNRC requires the washing of equipment, seeding of grass on disturbed areas and monitoring of disturbed areas to minimize the potential of noxious weeds being introduced. No long term or cumulative effects or impacts to plant communities are anticipated under this alternative.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to vegetation cover types are anticipated under this alternative.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

A variety of big game, small mammals, raptors and songbirds potentially use this area. NRIS searches of the area revealed a number of sensitive species occur near the area where the proposed telecommunications cable would be installed. These include sage grouse, fishers and wolverines have been present within the proposed project area however the installation would occur along an existing road with little impact to habitat or animal behavior.

Action Alternative: Some disturbance of animals and bird life could occur under this alternative, however due to the small disturbance size and the short duration of the proposed project, no long term impacts are expected to wildlife and fisheries habitats.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats would occur under this alternative.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

The Montana Natural Resource Information Service (NRIS) was queried for information regarding sensitive or endangered species located near the project area. The query results are listed below:

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – The Great Blue Heron is currently listed as sensitive by the State of Montana. According to the MNHP site, the blue heron primarily inhabits riparian areas and wetland habitats. This proposal will take place in the uplands away from riparian areas on state land and would not impact blue heron or their habitat.

Arctic grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*) – Fluvial arctic grayling is currently listed by the US Fish & Wildlife Service as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Grayling are listed as a high-risk species by the State of Montana and as a sensitive species by the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. The proposed installation of an underground telecommunications cable is away from the Big Hole River. The proposal would not impact arctic grayling or their habitat.

Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) – Wolverines are listed as sensitive species by both the BLM and USFS. Per Montana Natural Resource Information Service (NRIS) wolverines have been seen near the proposed easement site. This proposal however has a small foot print and use by wolverines will be intermittent in nature and the proposal should not alter the current existing habitat in the area. No long term or cumulative effects to wolverines, or their habitat are anticipated from this proposal.

Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) are known to inhabit the proposed project area. The proposed project however, is outside of designated Greater Sage Grouse Core Habitat, and Greater Sage Grouse General Habitat. There are no known leks near the cable installation site.

Weed management is required within core and general habitat for sage grouse. Reclamation of disturbed areas must include control of noxious weeds and invasive species, including cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*) and Japanese brome (*Bromus japonicas*).

Action Alternative: Due to the size and duration of the proposed project, no impacts are expected to occur to any endangered, threatened or sensitive species. The greatest threat to plant and animal habitat is the introduction of noxious weeds. For mitigation of this threat the DNRC requires the washing of equipment, seeding of grass on disturbed areas, and monitoring of disturbed areas to minimize the potential of noxious weeds being introduced for the next three years.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources are anticipated under this alternative.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Action Alternative: A Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory was conducted of the area of potential effect on state land in 2008. Despite a detailed examination, no cultural or fossil resources were identified in the easement corridor. No additional archaeological or paleontological investigative work is recommended. The proposed project will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to historical and archaeological sites would occur under this alternative.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Action Alternative: The proposed use is confined to existing corridor 20 feet wide that runs along existing roads that receive minimal use from the lessee. The telecommunications cable will be buried underground and very little disturbance to the area will occur. Due to the size and duration of this proposal there aren't any long term or cumulative impacts to aesthetics anticipated from this proposal.

No Action Alternative: No changes to aesthetics will occur under this alternative.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

Action Alternative: No other known demands to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy would be anticipated under this alternative.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no demands to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There are no known studies, plans or projects currently being investigated for this parcel of land or is the land under MEPA review.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain *POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS* following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Action Alternative: Additional traffic on the existing road could pose a safety risk to the lessee during the installation of the underground cable. Site distance of the road area is good. Mitigation measures should include requiring "men working" signs to be installed during the installation of the telecommunications cable.

No Action Alternative: No human health or safety concerns would occur if this alternative is chosen.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Neither of the proposed alternatives Action and No Action will affect industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production in the area.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

Neither of the proposed alternatives Action and No Action will affect quantity and distribution of employment in the area.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Neither of the proposed alternatives Action and No Action will affect local and state tax base or revenues in the area.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

Neither of the proposed alternatives Action and No Action will affect the demand for government services in the area.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

At this time there aren't any locally adopted environmental plans and goals for this area so neither of the proposed alternative will have any effect on zoning or management plans.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The area has no public access so recreational use is controlled by the lessee. Neither of the proposed alternatives will impact access or quality of recreational use of the area.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

Neither of the proposed alternatives Action and No Action will affect density and distribution of population and housing in the region.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Neither of the proposed alternatives Action or No Action will affect social structures and mores in the surrounding area.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be minor ground disturbance that will occur which could affect the cultural uniqueness and diversity of the area. The amount of area impacted however is 2.486 acres in size, and the cable will be underground. No long term or cumulative impacts to the cultural uniqueness and diversity of the area is anticipated from this alternative.

No Action Alternative: No changes to cultural uniqueness and diversity will occur under this alternative.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Action Alternative: If this alternative is chosen the Utility Easements would generate \$1,988.80 of revenue for the Capital Buildings Trust. In addition rural citizens in the Wisdom area will have the ability to receive high speed internet access through Southern Montana Telephone.

No Action Alternative: No revenue will be generated for the Common School Trust under this alternative.

**EA Checklist
Prepared By:**

Name: Timothy Egan
Title: Dillon Unit Manager

Date: 5/10/2018

V. FINDING**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

Action Alternative: A Utility Easement would be issued to Southern Montana Telephone for the installation of an underground telecommunications cable across state land.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Mitigation measures to prevent any long term or cumulative effects include the following;

- (1) Installation of the telecommunications cable will be limited to dry, conditions to prevent rutting and surface displacement. Any rutting and or surface disturbance must be immediately repaired and seeded with native grasses.

- (2) Licensee must repair or replace any damaged leaseholder improvements including but not limited to fences, gates, cattle guards and culverts.
- (3) Southern Montana Telephone will contact Dillon Unit once installation of the telecommunications cable has been installed for a final inspection.
- (4) Monitoring for noxious weeds and spraying any weeds that show up will be required for the next three years after project is completed.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐

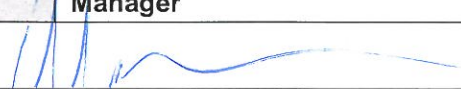
EIS

☐

More Detailed EA

☒

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Martin Balukas
	Title: Trust Lands Program Manager
Signature:	 Date: 5/18/18

Southwest Montana Telephone Company
Proposed Easement 4S, 16W, Sections 22 & 23

